

# The 2024 Policy Innovation Lab: Urban Food Security and Land Use Policy

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## Overview

The **Policy Innovation Lab (PIL)** is an interinstitutional collaboration between the **City of Lethbridge, the Prentice Institute, and Lethbridge Polytechnic** to address the topic of **urban food insecurity and municipal land use in Lethbridge**.

Developed as a new model for **Work Integrated Learning (WIL)**, the PIL empowers students to engage in civic decision-making by working on current municipal policy projects.

In May 2024, six undergraduate students participated in a four-week program to examine and propose policies to enhance food security in Lethbridge through the **Land Use Bylaw (LUB) renewal project**.

## Background

Using the ongoing City's Land Use Bylaw (LUB) renewal project as a framework, the PIL cohort examined policy interventions to tackle urban food security.

The project had **several objectives**:

- Better understand the underlying structural factors of food insecurity within Lethbridge.
- Grow the City's ability to access knowledge and skills to help navigate complex policy issues.
- Mobilizing academic expertise and research capacity to impact our immediate communities positively.
- Facilitate hands-on work experience for students in a municipal policy setting.
- To train and retain student talent and knowledge.

## PIL Structure

### Part A: Seminar Series

- **Two weeks of seminars** from knowledge holders to build a knowledge foundation.
- Students participated in **16 seminars**, including a coulee walk to learn the Blackfoot perspective on food and a visit to the local food bank.

### Part B: Research and Deliverables

- Students received two weeks to brainstorm collaboratively and to find directions for their policy recommendations.
- Students produce **two presentations** outlining the topic and their policy recommendations.
  - The presentation was later used to produce a **technical report**.

## Results

After PIL completion, students were given an evaluation survey for feedback.

**All participating students found the PIL to be:**

- A rewarding experience personally and professionally.
- Valuable for expanding their understanding of food insecurity and the municipal policy process.

**Most participating students found:**

- Engaging with knowledge holders as valuable for shaping the final presentation and outcomes
- The experience increased their likelihood of remaining in Lethbridge after the city.

**Some participating students found:**

- The PIL somewhat addressed the topic meaningfully.

## Discussions

During the pilot run, the PIL achieved many of its goal including providing:

- Students with hands-on work experience in a municipal policy setting and increasing student retention.
- The foundation to explore the underlying structural factors of food insecurity within Lethbridge through the technical report.
- Students access to community perspectives through knowledge holders allowing students to engage in research that will positively affect our immediate communities.

## Acknowledgement

The PIL is supported by the University of Lethbridge SSHRC Explore grant through the Prentice Institute.



**Photos:** Tour of Lethbridge Polytechnical farm (Upper-left); Coulee walk with Blackfoot Elders (Upper-right); Students brainstorming policy recommendation (Lower-left); Final student presentation (Left-right).